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**Title:** The Workers of the Eleventh Hour : Philology, Comparative Studies, and Living-Together

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**Citation style:** Sławek Tadeusz. (2015). The Workers of the Eleventh Hour : Philology, Comparative Studies, and Living-Together. "Rocznik Komparatystyczny" (Nr 6 (2015), s. 25-45), DOI: 10.18276/rk.2015.6-02



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## The Workers of the Eleventh Hour. Philology, Comparative Studies, and Living-Together

For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that was a householder, who went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard. 20:2 And when he had agreed with the laborers for a shilling a day, he sent them into his vineyard. 20:3 And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing in the marketplace idle; 20:4 and to them he said, Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. 20:5 Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise. 20:6 And about the eleventh *hour* he went out, and found others standing; and he saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? 20:7 They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard. 20:8 And when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the laborers, and pay them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. 20:9 And when they came that *were hired* about the eleventh hour, they received every man a shilling. 20:10 And when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received every man a shilling. 20:11 And when they received it, they murmured against the householder, 20:12 saying, These last have spent *but* one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat. 20:13 But he answered and said to one of them, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a shilling? 20:14 Take up that which is thine, and go thy way; it is my will to give unto this last, even as unto thee. 20:15 Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? or is thine eye evil, because I am good? 20:16 So the last shall be first, and the first last (St. Matthew, 20: 1–16).

## I

Who are the people of the “last hour”, of the one hour but last since the gospel calls them those of the “eleventh hour”, silent disturbers, whom others do not seem to like, people whose role in St. Matthew’s parable is to irritate and disturb the order of the day, a grain of sand in the otherwise perfectly working machine of the everyday? A first tentative answer could be that it is simply “us”, people of the times which, at least since 1960s, have seen themselves in situations of various “posts-”. Such qualifications as poststructuralism, postmodernism, postmarxism, postsecularism, and posthumanism are all terms which render contemporary ramifications of Friedrich Hölderlin’s famous claim that we are late comers. Hölderlin’s *wir kommen zu spät* marks the beginning of the eleventh hour which seems to be the time allotted to those have come too late, that is our time. One may be tempted to sigh with Legolas: “Alas for us all! And for all that walk the world in these after-days” (Tolkien, 1975: 490). Yet, this cryptic phrase “too late” refers also, we would like to believe, to something more important than a position in the development of human history. *Zu spät* signifies also a certain crisis of thinking, a deconstructive turn which wants thinking to inspect with suspicion all dualisms, the process of “mundunizing of philosophy – the rejection of dualisms in favor of an immanence viewed as more and more absolute”, which, in turn, “implies a profound discontinuity with its [philosophy’s] traditionally speculative form” (Esposito, 2012: 157). “Too late”, at the eleventh hour, indicates a necessity of approaching the world in a way both similar and different from the one practiced so far. Similar – because thinking never abandons its tendency towards searching for foundations, and different – because these foundations are now to be looked for in a realm which can be generally described as “life” rather than, for instance, transcendence. Yet, the rejection of dualisms suggests that materiality reality never fills completely the space of our thinking, that “there is always a little opening, something left over, a line of flight along which the vision of things can appear differently from what is there” (Esposito, 2012: 123). Comparing, we want to believe, searches for such openings and such a vision.

## II

Why do we read this parable here and today? What does it teach us, people of “these after-days”? First, it demonstrates that we do not have direct access to what determines the direction of our life and what supervises the way in which we organize our world. What else is this “kingdom of heaven”, *Basileia ton Ouranon*, if not a realm of sense and order which serves as a directive and corrective of our ways here, in the earthly kingdoms of these after-days. And yet this most important sphere upon which everything seems to depend cannot unfold before us, and we have to approach it only indirectly, obliquely. The name of this tangential approach is *comparison*. We can try to understand the ideal organization of our living together (this is what, I believe, the “kingdom of heaven” tries to name) only in a language which keeps us in the hold of what we know and through this makes effort at pointing at something other than what we know. This is the role of “like” (“For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that was a householder”), a rhetorical trope deeply entrenched in the aporias of similarity and difference and which connects us with generations of people who, before us, people of these after-days, made efforts to understand their lives. As Bruno Latour says, “It’s always tangentially, together, through the cross-ties of an impure, invented language that we finally find the words, those rare words that bring about what they say and that connect us [...] to what our predecessors tried to say” (Latour, 2013: 160). This is the first lesson of St. Matthew’s parable: comparison which, as Susan Friedman maintains, is “an inevitable mode of human cognition” (Friedman, 2011: 760), suggests the way to find “rare” words in which we reestablish a serious, profound contact with human efforts to make sense of our living together. Comparison is to be understood not only upon the epistemological but also ethical platform. The words which we are trying to find are “rare” because they connect not only different cultures and times but also but also what seems to be the epitome of dis-parity – the realm of the living with the kingdom of the dead. Ulysses knows that without establishing such a connection he will not be able to reach home, and hence in the XI Book of Homer’s epic he visits the Cimmerian shores and speaks to the dead who swarm out of Erebus. In this respect he can be considered the patron hero of philology which “is *nekyia*, descent to the dead [and] it joins

the largest, strangest, always growing collective and gives something of the life of its own language to the collective, to bring the underground ones to speech” (Hamacher, 2010: 998). Marcellus’s plea to Horace in the first act of *Hamlet* urging him to approach the mysterious ghost is strikingly telling: “Speak to him, you’re a scholar”. Scholars are those who can and must speak with the dead to improve the being together of the living. We may claim that the workers of the eleventh hour are those who are particularly aware of this task.

### III

The second lesson takes us precisely to the realm of living together for which three concepts seems essential: labour, payment, and agreement which mediates between the two and secures a peaceful relationship between them. The householder, *oikodespotes*, hires people to do certain work promising them a financial remuneration, and this constellation of forces and interests lasts as long as the agreement holds. Human world depends then on the subtle balance between the work of hands and the truth of a promise, but, as Matthew’s parable develops, we notice that it also depends on the manner in which we *interpret* the promise of truth upon which hinges the agreement regulating the organization of human world. The interpretation of those who came first is different from those who came last; *protoi* do not conceive of the nature of the agreement in the way in which *eschatoi* do. From this it follows that if our living together proceeds from the system of rules which Matthew summarily calls the “agreement” (the Greek word used by Matthew can also be rendered in English as “sounding together”, “be in harmony with”), then in order to understand this agreement we must critically reflect upon it, de-monolithize its rules, allowing for differences of interpretation, and to effectuate this we must *compare* reasons and motivations, elucidations and explanations, allegorizations and exegeses. This is a wide project which takes us a long way. It refers to the matters intra-human but, at the same time, it opens our thinking towards matters supra-human, or rather non-human, including both the animal and divine. Let us remember that Matthew’s *Basileia ton Ouranon* uses the word “kingdom” only to respect the Jewish reluctance to openly name “God” in the human language. This certainly involves breaking up the tacit conviction of

the supremacy and independence of the intra-human world, and this breach owes its energies to the activity of comparing. Roberto Esposito quotes August Comte's judgment upon the undoing of the anthropocentric prejudice, the judgment in which the notion of comparison looms large as the proposition of a new methodology of a non-anthropocentric philosophy: "It is a very irrational disdain – writes Comte – which makes us object to all comparison between human society and the social state of the lower animals. This unphilosophical pride arose out of the protracted influence of the theological-metaphysical philosophy" (Esposito, 2012: 32). Comparison would not only invite us to investigate the nature and various interpretations of the agreement regulating intra-human matters but would make us aware that no serious change can be introduced in the state of human affairs unless we relate them to the sphere of the non-human. This is, at least in part, parallel to Hans Blumenberg's emphasis on myth as a force reemerging ultimately from underneath the lay structures of human-all-too-human history. As Roberto Esposito argues, "[...] when the underlying stratum of history is opened up, the language of myth resurfaces in all its vital and mortal ambivalence" (Esposito, 2012: 209).

## IV

Lesson three deals with what is at the heart of the agreement, of this strange contract that, if working well, holds people together and makes them speak in harmony. In most general terms we describe it as "justice". When the people of the early hour endorse the agreement, they are hoping to be treated differently from those who will come at the eleventh hour. It is a question of a connection between time and labour and the balance holding them together, the balance which ought to regulate further actions, if they are to earn the name of rightness. Justice and rightness depend upon comparing because only setting one action against another, one word against another, one text against another, can we claim that one is rightful whereas the other is not, one is good the other is bad. This rightness is formulated in the order of promise; as the householder says to his workers "whatsoever is right I will give you", and we firmly believe that this "whatsoever is right" will result from not so much placing me *with* others but, rather, *against* others. Comparison certainly serves justice,

but when provided with the unlimited leeway it may undo the society which it wanted to harmoniously construct. When limited to this kind of operation, comparing works with a negative slant, i.e. it includes by excluding, it offers justice to one by punishing bad deeds but not necessarily by rewarding good and making up for wrong actions. The labourers of the early hour, interested in determining a common measure to all human actions, the measure which supports the present model of reality based upon comparison which serves as another name of competition, want to question the agreement which forms the basis of our living together not so much struggling on behalf of good but, rather, investigating the wrong which supposedly has been done to them (“And when they received it, they murmured against the householder”). This is why the householder responds to their complaints, “Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a shilling?” *The point is not so much to do justice but to do no wrong.* More than truth, we need to know how not to do wrong. Thus, we have to think senses of comparing other than mere setting one action against another. The ethics of comparative activity: we compare in order to learn how not to do wrong, i.e. to learn humbleness and shame.

## V

It is now that we come to the people of the eleventh hour. They do not respond to the situation by arguing about equality and justice. This is the job of those who came early and who, not unjustly in the routinely accepted sense of justice, feel exploited and cheated (“These last have spent *but* one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat”). Their understanding of justice paradoxically excludes equality, they believe in the equality of not equal. But their actions are not quite “theirs” but those dictated to them by what they consider to be law, the strongest of the received structures in which we have organized our world and our living together. Those who work under the sign of the eleventh hour respond to the challenge differently. They do it by “going their way”, i.e. they respect the “agreement” not in its juridical and legalistic sense which wants to detect the wrong and penalize its perpetrator. They comprehend the agreement in the sense of the “good” which can be done on its basis. The

householder who, from the point of view of our argument, stands close to the late comers, who in fact *is* one of them, acts precisely on the strength of the “agreement”: the equality he speaks of is that of the promise, the equality-to-come, not its mere human version founded upon resentment and the dead letter of the law. The householder also “compares”, but he realizes that the point of comparison does not reside in finding a common measure and *answering* questions concerning what is good and bad but precisely *in raising questions about good and evil, the wrong and the good, as they exist in the world organized by the human being*. In this case the law does not abdicate, but it does not block and paralyze a reflection which each individual ought to dedicate to the matters which normally we mechanically relegate to decisions of the law. This is how we understand the householder’s *dictum* “Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? or is thine eye evil, because I am good?” Lawful is what I do with “my own”, that is, my actions result from my consideration of many issues in question rather than from the routine which wants us to tread in the footsteps of what has always been thought and done. The question then is not “what is justice?” but “what do I do with justice?” Comparing in this mode reduces automatisms of our responses and necessitates our own reflexivity upon the vital questions of our lives.

## VI

The ethics of the householder and of the people of the eleventh hour conceives of justice and equality not as a stabilization of the *status quo* but as its shake-up. The main precept of this ethics reads *hoi eschatoi protoi kai hoi protoi eschatoi*, “So the last shall be first, and the first last”, and we should understand it less as a dictate of revolution and more as an attempt to introduce love and hope into the ways in which organize our living together, ways which are normally regulated by the law. No wonder that those who belong to the early hour “murmur” in disappointment. “There is something inside of love – its enclosure in a world of duality – that essentially contradicts justice” (Esposito, 2012a: 123). They do not comprehend the “you” with which the householder addresses them and tries to neutralize the petrifying glance of the dead letter of the law. The “you” in question is the term of amorous discourse,



whereas they take it to mean the term of aggressive dismissal. “So the last shall be first, and the first last”, from the last to the first: from the mechanical and mechanistic application of the rule and principle to a thoughtful and always risky and challenging reflection upon the rule, reflection which frequently entails transgression. In the logic of William Blake: “You never know what is enough unless you know what is more than enough”, and “One Law for the Lion & Ox is Oppression” (Blake, 1969: 152, 158). The late comer may himself/herself tacitly endorse the structure of reality, but the critical analysis of the socio-political ordering always starts with the late comers. The ethics of the eleventh hour, the ethics of the last ones, of those who come late, works on the utopistic (not utopian) level: it shows distant, fantasmatic forms of the democracy towards which we should be moving but which, for their own advantage, will not materialize. If they did, they would be no more than mere embodiments of utopia, and history has supplied us with ample evidence that there is nothing worse than a fulfilled utopia. *We claim that comparing is a practice of thinking which does not merely endorse the givenness of the world order but which is aware of what Radhakrishnan calls the “utopian-transcendent urge to imagine otherwise”* (Radhakrishnan, 2003: vi). Another lesson of St. Matthew’s parable consists in its insistently urging us “to imagine otherwise”.

## VII

Before we hear the ultimate message of “So the last shall be first, and the first last”, we should not miss what seems to constitute a necessary prelude to this proclamation which urges people to be men of the road. *Aron ton son kai hypage*, “Take up that which is thine, and go thy way”, criticizes people of the early hours for obstinately clinging not so much to their rights but to their imaginary suppositions. To belong to the eleventh hour means not to “suppose” but to be on the way, to be closer to the road rather than to the law. Edgar Morin articulates the difference between the two: “[...] the law (*la loi*) is frequently an obstacle for the way (*la voie*) because to be immobile lies in the very nature of the law, whereas the way must be dynamic” (Morin, Ramadan, 2014: 264). This is why the people of the eleventh hour, the ones who are on their way, have a problematic relationship with the law. It would be too simple

and inaccurate to claim that they reject law, deny it and transform themselves into outlaws. What people of the eleventh hour, and the householder whose actions puts them in the center of our attention, do is they reject the view of anything as monolithic which is exactly the natural tendency of the law which looks at human individual and human society as monoliths subjected to the operations of one system. The relationship with the law is “problematic”, i.e. people of the eleventh hour view the law precisely not as a solution to the problem but as one of the crucial factors contributing to it. They undertake a critique of the law and support what Blanchot calls “for ever greater justice” (Blanchot, 2010: 165).<sup>1</sup> They *act* on behalf of the way, that is, they want to demonstrate limitations of the law, the treason which the law commits in the very process of its own formation, against its own principle of justice. Thus, “the way has to break the law in order to make new laws possible” (Morin, Ramadan, 2014: 264); to speak on behalf of those who belong to the eleventh hour implies contestation of the blind legalism of the law. We should certainly hear this message in the householder’s instruction given to one of the first ones: “Take up that which is thine, and go thy way”. If the command is obeyed, it will translate the addressee from the regime of the first hour to the the order of the eleventh.

## VIII

People of the early hours hold on to their own suppositions because they believe they *know*; they are convinced there is a common measure to everything, the measure which serves as the foundation of justice and equality. These two virtues hinge upon a system of power which aims at restraining man’s desires and securing the political structure able to impose and maintain the order. As Dante puts it in the 16<sup>th</sup> Canto of Purgatory: man has to construct laws controlling the course of human passions and install a king who, illuminated by the truth, would control the course of public history: *Onde convenne legge per fren porre; convenne rege aver, che discernesse de la vera cittade almen la torre.*

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<sup>1</sup> See also remarks on this subject in Roberto Esposito’s *Third Person*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012. 132–133.

Hence the labourers of the early hour compare themselves with others from and on the platform of order and *knowing*. The comparison we postulate in this essay, however, inevitably has to elaborate on man but not from the point of what it knows about himself/herself but from the place where such knowledge is suspended and where the light of truth is dimmed, if not absent. This evokes what Leopardi called a position of “half philosophy” (*mezza filosofia*) which Esposito enlarges upon as thinking “concerned with protecting people from the brutal impact with the truth that early modern thought confronted without caring about consequences [...]”, a thinking which does not want to delude itself “that illusion can be dispensed with” (Esposito, 2012: 127). Similarly, Werner Hamacher commenting upon Hölderlin’s famous line *Gibt es auf Erden ein Maaß? Es gibt keines*, points at limitations of anthropology which stems from this discipline’s firm conviction that “it thinks it knows that man is the unshakeable certainty of the subject and as such the measure of all things” (Hamacher, 2010: 997). Hamacher’s next move is to open the inexorable gap between language and what is ineffable.”But *asking* about man exposes this certainty to a language that offers no measure of man and thus no measure of anything at all”. The householder and the labourers of the eleventh hour then mainly *ask* about man; this is what is meant by the householder’s command “Take up that which is thine, and go thy way”.

## IX

These ways are obviously numerous, as each road constantly designs and redesigns itself. This implies that we have to deal with a dispersion of measures which, in turn, allows us to infer that now, when comparing, our task is not to find a common measure but rather to be able to work on the connectivity of all the dispersed elements and fragments no longer ordered by one common rule. Edgar Morin observes that one of the problems of late modernity is a waning ability to connect (*relier*) scattered grains of reality. His philosophical war cry is a plea for relatedness which would not only connect separate atoms of experience but would restore reliability to the structures we give to our world. Morin presents himself as a thinker obsessed with the problem of *reliance*, a philosopher whose thinking aims at reconnecting “innumerable spontaneous

and dispersed experiences” (*innombrables expériences spontanées et dispersées*) (Morin, Ramadan, 2014: 220). No wonder that he formulates his programme as *De la reliance, encore la reliance, toujours de la reliance*. Comparison, as practiced by the householder and men of the eleventh hour, means always asking about man, that is – refusing to be satisfied with the arrogations of the human measure and never tiring at weaving webs of connectivity between the dispersed atoms of reality. *We wish to refer to this kind of comparison which connects without the combative competitiveness inter-paring*. It is in this manner that reading connects with the world and may lead to a new, more sensitive politics. With a little help from Gayatri Spivak, we could claim that the task of inter-paring is: “to realize that the literary text in isolation does not lead directly to savvy politics” (Spivak, 2003: 53).

Yet another way of putting it is suggested by the situation in the vineyard parable: it is energized by the inbuilt comparison mechanism – we cannot help setting those who started working at six in the morning with those who were hired in the late afternoon. When the latter appear, they already stand in reference to the former. Without this machinery of relatedness the parable would not work. Jean-Luc Nancy sees it as a feature of human finitude, since, as claims, “finitude *co-appears* or *compears* and can only *compear*” (Nancy, 1991: 28). If we remain within the circle of comparing which tries to relate the two elements with regard to a third party or agency (this is what we do when we react with angry astonishment to the householder’s decision which we qualify as “unjust”), we will not be able to think of a world organized along lines different from those holding now. The grammar of such comparison is A versus B, one against the other; such a grammar frames a vision of the world as continuous war and accentuates a profound separatedness of the people of the first hour from those of the eleventh. They have literally nothing “in common” with each other because so much of the human “other” has been usurped by the impersonal and abstract law with which it is impossible to have anything “in common”. The “common” has become an external system which neutralizes the “other” by taking over his/her role and barring him/her from existential questions. This is a good example of what Anthony Giddens calls “sequestration of experience” (Giddens, 2002: 317), a situation in which the institutional system of reflexivity separates us from potentially disturbing questions concerning the way in which

we understand and conceive of our existence. The world cannot be transformed but sinks more and more deeply within the hitherto existing familiar structures. The task if inter-parison is (1) to imagine otherwise, (2) to probe into the nature of justice and equality, (3) make us abandon all kinds of safety devices provided by our ordering of the world and in this way open space for the reflection upon cardinal questions of our own existence.

## X

In St. Matthew's narrative the speaking roles are distributed unevenly: the householder speaks, and so do the people of early hours. Those who live under the auspices of the eleventh hour remain silent. Inter-parison wants to understand this silence, but the only way to approach this task is through speaking, exercising proper care and maintaining appropriate distance. We do not hear their voices because they are no longer *here*, as, anticipating the householder's admonition, they "went their way". *People of the eleventh hour never take positions and never settle down building embankments around their living quarters; they do not belong to the regime of the law but to the open space of the way.* They, like Walt Whitman, may be singing songs of the road but are unlikely to make propositional statements or indulge in juridical arguments. Anything they say and predicate about various issues and objects forms a certain knowledge which derives from an impossible position in which all knowledge is suspended and made tentative. Montaigne wanted to speak from such an unmappable position in his essays in which he looks for *ignorance forte et genereuse*. This is why the people of the eleventh hour remain silent; they deal with the "rest" which is always left out from all kinds of knowledge, the rest which is, as Shakespeare well knew, silent but which has to be somehow articulated. *This strange articulation of the silent "rest" is what constitutes the terrain and activity of inter-parison.* It is "the area in which philology moves and changes itself" (Hamacher, 2010: 998).

It is the labourers of the early hours that are making a legal case saying, "These last have spent *but* one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat". They com-

pare, while their eleventh hour counterparts inter-pare, work amidst empty spaces without the privilege of any decisive destination which would terminate their labours. These empty spaces, a result of the *interpositional* position of inter-paring, open space for the future, a different future, they welcome what-is-to-come

## XI

Hence, the patron writers of the labourers of the eleventh hour are masters of the hyphon, champions of the unsaid, such as Emily Dickinson or Edgar Allan Poe, who did not wish, by offering any decisive formulae for the present, to close it off against the future. It is this openness towards the future which marks comparing as inter-paring. This is also what is philology as redefined by Werner Hamacher who claims that signs of spacing such as comma for example “[...] may also hint at that which is not asserted but is called and invited to come. Philology would then be attention to that which interpunctuates, brings to a hold, creates ceasuras, because within it something that comes – or is coming – becomes noticeable” (Hamacher, 2010: 1000). The last fragment of Hamacher’s statement is particularly significant: in the act of inter-parison there appears something which is coming, something which is not finished, not completed, the imperfect object which only announces itself, promises itself to us as a special guest. It is noticeable only in such an imperfect grammatical mode, because when it will have come, it would have been intercepted by the organized world order, and thus become a part of the dominant structure. What is coming undoes what already IS, which corresponds to our sense of comparing as inter-paring, and in this way runs parallel to what Gayatri Spivak envisages as the mission of “the new Comparative Literature”: “Just as socialism at its best would persistently and repeatedly wrench capital from capitalism, so must the new Comparative Literature persistently and repeatedly undermine and undo the definitive tendency of the dominant to appropriate the emergent” (Spivak, 2003: 100). *This helps us to define inter-paring as the reading activity which reveals the emergent and prevents it from becoming a part of the dominant.*

## XII

The task of inter-parison is *asking*. Inter-paring we treat all answers as tentative and temporary, sooner or later to be undermined by the energy of interrogation. It is the force of the question, always opening fissures in the seemingly solid and smooth surface of the answer, always working in the interstices and interspaces, which is responsible for putting it in the service of the carnivalesque and spiritual. Inter-paring works between texts in order to disclose the force of the spiritual aenesthetized and occluded by the impositions of the materiality of life on the one hand and religion regressing to the position of sheer orthodoxy of the definitive answer on the other. Tariq Ramadan's judgment of contemporary Islam can be extended over upon the Christian West. According to the Arab philosopher, religious discourse "has too often lost its substance, which is that of meaning, of understanding ultimate goals and the state of the heart. Increasingly, it has been reduced to reactivity, preoccupied with the moral protection of the faithful, based on the reiteration of norms, rituals and, above all, prohibitions" (Ramadan, 2012: 141). Inter-parison constitutes a whole spectrum of readings which try to regain the force of meaning as a quest, as a serious and never-ending questioning process, which aims at empowering man not to find but search for sense independent of agencies and institutions which present themselves as lords and distributors of meaning. Thus, inter-parison opens also inter- (rather than post-)secular and inter-divine space in which the world can be reconceived in the utopistic way in which the gap between the political and ethical, power and spirit, has been envisioned as unnecessary, reductive and reactive. We need to remember Coomaraswamy's statement that God is meaning which echoes Rumi's claim that the world of spirit is the world of meaning (*alam-i ma'na*) (Nasr, 2010: 418). Inter-paring, we bring to light the predicament of contemporary culture and life spread between the awareness that "the struggle for power has sometimes eclipsed the quest for meaning" and the conviction that "the quest for meaning and peace of heart [rather than mere protective shell of prohibitions and dogmas] is the essence of religion" (Ramadan, 2012: 143).

### XIII

Can we then see ourselves and our future in categories transcending those which we have produced so far and imposed upon ourselves in our history? Is there a “rest” which somehow grounds these categories and which has been eclipsed by them? What is this “rest” which they both reveal and hide, manifest and suppress? The rest which will have to be awakened and activated. The language that still is asleep. Werner Hamacher maintains that “philology is the Trojan horse in the walls of our sleeping languages. If they awaken” (Hamacher, 2010: 1000), and it is not incidental that the sentence ends with a comma; i.e. does not really end, as it is only in this way that we may gain access to the interstices among words, we may descend towards the hidden and silent meaning, and the task of such a philology, which remarkably coincides with what we call here inter-parison, is to bring “the underground ones to speech” (Hamacher, 2010: 998). We should carefully notice the frequency with which Matthew reiterates the adjective “idle” in his narrative. As in the act of inter-parison the most important issue is not to merely juxtapose various elements but make them *work*. To inter-pare means to activate what has been dormant and thus inactive. Bringing the underground ones to speech names the effort which is at the center of inter-paring – intensifying and making truthful the sense of living together which must mean working with words of those who preceded us, words which “spoken by the generations that came before us and which we need to make truthful in turn, just as they made those of their predecessors truthful by twisting them thoroughly through a series of elaborations the devil alone can make us take for simple lies” (Latour, 2013: 117).

### XIV

Norman O. Brown in his last book gives an example of such inter-parative effort working in the fissures between Christianity and Islam, secularity and religion, literality and metaphor. Brown’s ambition by twenty years precedes Hamacher’s: to reactivate and bring back to life imagination as a force able to accommodate the unnameable, and to open the way for efforts at changing



our ways of living together. Like Hamacher, Brown also redefines the task of philology, and sees it in the hermeneutic attempt which allows us to see the spirit of prophecy underneath the dominant tone of philology. Looking for inspiration in Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* Brown approaches prophecy "as a rational or scientific investigation of [...] the principle of irrationality in human affairs. It is reason examining its own opposite, faith; it is philosophy confronting its own opposite, prophecy, and recognizing in prophecy the fundamental form of the principle of authority in human affairs" (Brown, 1991: 96). Unable to do justice here to Brown's detailed and attentive reading of 18<sup>th</sup> Sura of the Koran, suffice it say that it highlights two points important for inter-paring: (1) the connectivity which allows for incorporating the Koranic text into a rich constellation of other texts thus demonolithizing Islam, and (2) demonstrating that such a task is possible only if we suspend the traditional reading of history as a chronological sequence of events ultimately resulting in the teleological structure, be it the Christian Second Coming, Marxist dissolution of the state, or Hegelian the Cunning of Reason leading up to the embodiment of the spirit of history in the Prussian state. *Radicalism of the prophetic spirit, as the radicalism of Hamacher's philology, and Spivak's new planetary Comparative Literature, consists in the apocalyptic breaking up of the teleological chain, disrupting it, so that events, texts, words, losing their original context, would open up to the unpredictable laws of connectivity.* On the strength of these laws readiness to form new relatedness spells the end of the relations holding right now and thus puts the "end" in the immediate vicinity of the "beginning". As Brown claims, "The Koran backs off from that linear organization of time, revelation, and history which became the backbone of orthodox Christianity and remains the backbone of the Western culture after the death of God. Islam is wholly apocalyptic or eschatological, and its eschatology is not teleology [...]; eschatology can break out at any moment" (Brown, 1991: 86).

## XV

People of the eleventh hour remain close to the spirit of apocalypse not only because they literally turn up at the end of time, in these after-days, but

also because they are a force through which the accepted, received understanding of such fundamental concepts as justice and equality is apocalyptically deconstructed. Father Waław Hryniewicz interrogating the question of “why we don’t like people of the eleventh hour?” suggests that it is because we cannot understand the workings of God’s mercy which remains in a clear conflict with our culture based upon the merely calculative concept of justice in which an offense finds a proportionate and adequate punishment, and labour is measured by the expense of time necessary to perform it. This logic of frugality and maximum economy cannot readily understand the logic of God’s justice which works on the model of prodigality if not wastefulness (Hryniewicz, 2005: 224). The householder certainly “compares”; he knows the difference between people of the first and eleventh hour. But his comparing establishes an equality which violates all the principles of the justice administered by law. No human juridical institution would endorse the householder’s decision; nothing could bespeak of such grossly offensive inequality which, however, introduces the equality so radical that the human being cannot accommodate it. The utopistic (once again, we have to carefully differentiate it from “utopian”) equality of a justice towards which we should be moving without hope of ever reaching the destination. This is why we have called it “utopistic” – as it never can impose its rule in the absolute fashion, it remains a vision which has the power to correct at least some of the faults of the present state of our being together. In this context inter-paring unfolds itself as a form of thinking which is not only, as David Damrosch claimed, “a renewed engagement with national traditions and global contexts” (Damrosch, 2003: 327), but also a renewed commitment to notions like justice and equality. *This renewal implies that in one way or another we cannot and do not want to leave things the way they have been.* R. Radhakrishnan, having arrogated elsewhere that “theory cannot be an acquiescence in the *status quo*” (Radhakrishnan, 2003: vi), argues that the very activity of comparing is conditioned by the will to change: “Why compare, unless the performance of comparison transforms the world and the many actors who have volunteered to participate in the project? Why compare, if, after the comparison, each actor goes back to her corner to pursue business as usual?” (Radhakrishnan, 2009: 470).

## XVI

The householder then destabilizes the order not by invalidating its categories but by provoking us to ask on what grounds we have granted them that dominant position which allows us to assume that from the very comparison of the people of the first and eleventh hour must result a better and more reasonable claim of the former to justice. Comparison becomes inter-parison when the act of setting one element against the other does not determine a hierarchy of access to social virtues but, rather, makes those virtues available on the basis of equality to all participating agents. It does not eliminate differences but significantly transforms their character: now they do not set one element *against* the other but, on the principle of good neighbourhood, put one *with* the other. Now, people of the first are not *against* but *with* those of eleventh hour. Being-with is a principal level upon which inter-parison operates. Inter-parison is then *syncretic*, it enables us to distinguish, differentiate (Greek *krino*) but, at the same time, it does not prioritize by cancelling or disregarding one of the differentiated elements<sup>2</sup>. It follows then that there can be no limit at which the access to justice can be cut; even those coming at the twelfth hour would be admitted. Inter-parison is never terminated; it allows for and invites more and more texts, and it is precisely this *and* which constitutes the heart of this kind of comparison which seems to be conjunctive in its character. This has been noticed by Haun Saussy who, having stated that the *and* model of comparative literature is the alternative to the tree-shaped model of comparatism interpreted along evolutionary lines, elucidates that, “Lacking a common substance to which the differences among its objects might be reduced, comparative literature has grown [...] through the lateral construction of linking elements”, and hence the task of such an conjunctive operation is not to “discover” meanings but rather to “produce” them which “brings experimental quality to comparative literature and shows why its virtues are inseparable from its questionable legitimacy” (Saussy, 2003: 338–339).

It is this combination of *being-with* and the *and* strategy which we find behind, for example, Spivak’s writings on Islam in which the deconstructive

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<sup>2</sup> I am following here suggestions of Susan Stanford Friedman from her essay „Why Not Compare?” *Publications of Modern Language Association of America* 126.3 (2011): 753–763.

potential of what we call here inter-parison allows for a much more nuanced and politically savvy attitude on the whole painfully lacking from the political world: “It is altogether appropriate that Comparative Literature should undo the politically monolithized view of Islam that rules the globe today, without compromising the strong unifying ideology potentially alive in that particular cultural formation” (Spivak, 2003: 87).

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## **The Workers of the Eleventh Hour. Philology, Comparative Studies, and Living-Together**

### **Summary**

The essay reads St. Matthews' parable of the vineyard as a model mechanism of comparing.

The "kingdom of heaven" is a realm of sense and order which serves as a directive and corrective of our ways here in the earthly kingdoms of these after-days. And yet this most important sphere upon which everything seems to depend cannot unfold before us, and we have to approach it only indirectly, obliquely. The name of this tangential approach is *comparison*. We can try to understand the ideal organization of our living together (this is what, I believe, the "kingdom of heaven" tries to name) only in a language which keeps us in the hold of what we know and through this makes effort at pointing at something other than what we know. The essay also introduces the notion of inter-parison, i.e. a whole spectrum of readings which try to regain the force of meaning as a quest, as a serious and never-ending questioning process, which

aims at empowering man not to find but search for sense independent of agencies and institutions which present themselves as distributors of meaning. Thus, inter-parison opens also inter- (rather than post-)secular and inter-divine space in which the world can be reconceived in the utopistic way in which the gap between the political and ethical, power and spirit, has been envisioned as unnecessary, reductive and reactive.

**Keywords:** comparative literature, comparison, philology, utopia, change, prophecy, connectivity

**Słowa kluczowe:** literatura porównawcza, porównanie, filologia, utopia, zmiana, prorocstwo, łączliwość